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MEMORANDUM

Some Implications of the Soviet - West German Treaty

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Some Implications of the Soviet-West German Treaty*

1. It is much too early to reach "any thumping historic conclusions" about the Soviet-West German non-aggression treaty recently signed in Moscow. It may also be true that Western reactions to the treaty have generally been calm, characterized by what the press has called a "mature tendency to watch and wait". Still, there are those who, on the one hand, are tempted to see in it the beginnings of a marvelous new era in European affairs and, on the other, a few who see the beginnings of a West German sell-out and an ominous advance of Soviet influence into all of Western Europe.

* This memorandum was prepared by the Office of National Estimates. It was discussed with representatives of the Office of Current Intelligence and the Directorate of Plans, who concur in its main judgments.

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2. Whatever the ultimate implications of the treaty, Bonn has behaved with surprising speed and vigor, even unseemly alacrity. In rather short order, a treaty was worked out in Moscow, Gromyko was seen smiling at Scheel, and Brandt was photographed reviewing the honor guard at Vnukovo. If the Allies were not exactly left in the dust by all this, they nonetheless were not fully informed, had little influence on the negotiations, and found themselves for the first time contemplating the meanings of independent West German movement in the East. And, despite official protestations of approval and "satisfaction", there were some misgivings, in Washington, Paris, and London and perhaps especially so in West Berlin.

3. But at the moment there is little cause for alarm. As they themselves never seem to tire of saying, the West Germans are not only tied closely to the US and into NATO, they very much want to be. Among other things, they cannot imagine protecting their own interests and dealing with the Soviets in any other way. Moreover, in seeking to improve relations with the USSR, they assert they are serving broad Western interests as well as their own. They hope their new attitudes toward the East will help to eliminate "the German problem" and will contribute to the emergence of a peaceful and economically profitable modus

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vivendi with the East. And in the long-term they believe that rapprochement with the Russians is the best and perhaps the only way to achieve German reunification.

4. But this is not to say that things will necessarily march in the ways foreseen by Bonn or that all of Bonn's attitudes and actions will neatly coincide with the interests of the United States and the other Western powers. Nor does it mean, obviously, that the USSR will be deprived of opportunities to proceed in its own fashion in a direction of its own choosing. On the contrary, a case can be made (and is, below) that, partly because of this West German behavior and these West German aspirations, Soviet fortunes in Western Europe are at least as likely to improve as they are to diminish.

5. What did the Soviets give to the West Germans during the treaty formulation process to get whatever it is they got, or expect to get? Precious little, aside from a few gestures -- reducing the flow of anti-FRG propaganda, letting the West German delegation tamper a mite with the text of the treaty, and agreeing that the USSR would no longer claim the right to intervene in West German domestic affairs. But, in view of West German behavior after the negotiations had begun, the Soviets came

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to believe that there was no need to make any substantial concessions. The Germans did not go to Moscow as simple supplicants but they behaved much more as the wooers than the wooed. They scarcely bothered to conceal their anxiety for an agreement; they sometimes seemed afraid to ask for much more than they were reasonably confident of getting; and they apparently were persuaded that they were not likely to get very much.

6. The Germans claim that they didn't give much either. In some ways, this too is true. They did not make any specific promises affecting economic relations; they reiterated their interest in West Berlin; and they made quite clear their continued attachment to the Western alliance. Moreover, Brandt regularly advances the notion that it cost the FRG nothing simply to recognize reality -- e.g., the existence of the Oder-Neisse line, the border between East and West Germany, and, in effect, the German Democratic Republic.

7. Still, of all people, the Germans should be aware of the subtleties of "reality", especially political reality. True, apart from mutual pledges to refrain from the use of force, the treaty just signed does not call for any very tangible acts or arrangements. It is in this sense only a symbol, the verification essentially of a state of mind, or change of mind.

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Nevertheless, the abandonment of previous positions, no matter how unreal, can have some very concrete consequences. And this, presumably, is what Moscow is counting on.

8. What Soviet aims might, in fact, be served by the treaty and what it represents? There is, to begin with, the perfectly obvious: the treaty -- which has been sanctioned by the other Western powers -- confirms the postwar configurations of Europe. And, in the Soviet view, this treaty might lead to further confirmations, as for example might emerge from a European Security Conference.

9. In the West, where weariness with the cold war and optimism about Moscow's purposes seem to dominate the public mood, the Soviets look forward to a further erosion of the US position. Among other things, Bonn, once vigorously skeptical about Soviet intentions and the most stalwart US ally, has now more or less joined the mainstream of West European opinion. It has, simultaneously, embarked on a course intended in part to reduce its political dependence on the US.

10. West German attitudes toward the US have of course been changing for some time. So too have West German attitudes about Bonn's proper role within the Western alliance and within

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Europe as a whole. Essentially, these changes merely reflect a quite natural increase in West German self-confidence and self-assertiveness, a process which has perhaps inevitably accompanied economic achievement and the simple passage of time since World War II. Brandt does not seek to conceal what's going on. Some in a friendly alliance are more equal than others, he says, and in NATO "the US has been much more equal, and we less so". Now, however, "by becoming a bit more equal", Bonn can "add a significant voice to the strategic debate".

11. Contributing to the shift in the West German mood have been two factors of external origin quite relevant to this "strategic debate": (1) gradual changes in the US posture vis-a-vis both Europe and the USSR which force a prudent Bonn at least to consider the prospect of a substantial US withdrawal from the continent; and (2) a shift in the Soviet attitude (scarcely even interrupted by Czechoslovakia) which is intended to suggest to the West Europeans a new USSR -- stronger than ever but increasingly sober and benign -- and which encourages a hopeful Bonn to test the prospects for a significant reduction in East-West tensions, at least in Europe.

12. There is no way of knowing just how much the political evolution in West Germany -- particularly the growing desire

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for greater independence and international stature -- has contributed to Bonn's eagerness to sign the treaty with the USSR. Certainly one motive behind Ostpolitik is a partially formulated German desire to see the FRG emerge as the major West European power on the world scene, in the manner envisaged by de Gaulle for France. And at least some Germans -- including Foreign Minister Scheel -- have since revealed that they find a demonstration of their independence of the Allied powers to be an altogether satisfying experience.

13. In any case, what has been termed the political coming of age of the FRG, marked by the signing of the non-aggression treaty with the Soviets, has caused some general uneasiness in other European capitals. Not so much because of the spectre of Rapallo, but because it might signify that the Federal Republic of Germany is now the leading power in Western Europe, fully understands this, and, perhaps, intends to act accordingly.

14. In Eastern Europe, hopes for independence die very hard and East-West detente is customarily conceived of as a means to further independent national interests, both political and economic. In this atmosphere, expanding West German activities could create some messy problems for the Soviets. Nevertheless, Moscow presumably believes that it can control the effects

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of closer economic contacts and prevent the development of meaningful political ties. It has so far taken pains to ensure that East European policies toward the FRG are coordinated with and subordinate to those of the USSR (even to the point of not letting the Poles be the first to win West Germany's formal acceptance of the Oder-Neisse frontier). It would be surprising if it were now to relax these efforts. In any case, if Western Europe, and especially Western Germany, acknowledge the division of Europe -- the legitimacy of the GDR and of the Soviet presence throughout Eastern Europe -- the chances of closer political ties between East and West Europe would diminish. And it is precisely this concept of a drawing together of East and West in Europe which offers the Easterners their most promising long-term alternative to Soviet domination.

15. Today, in fact, many East Europeans -- though still eagerly anticipating economic benefits -- may be having second thoughts about detente in Europe. They are aware that, while the Westerners are inclined to view it as a means to heal the East-West split and to reduce Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe, the Soviets seem to regard it as a promising way to perpetuate both. Thus what the East Europeans (i.e., those East Europeans

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who wish to further their own autonomy) have really been wishing for was not just any old detente but the kind which would come about principally on Western terms and which would be made possible in the main by Soviet concessions. What they see now may suggest the opposite kind of movement.

16. There is another aspect of Brandt's Ostpolitik which the Soviets may find especially promising -- the handle it gives them on West German politics. As became quite obvious during the summer, the Soviets much prefer the Brandt government to its predecessors and are willing within limits to try to help Brandt out when he runs into trouble with his domestic opposition. Though he must have had some doubts about its possible effects, Brandt did not seem at all unhappy about getting this kind of support.

17. Moreover, Moscow's influence in Bonn may increase as a consequence of Brandt's mounting stake in the success of his Eastern policy. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that Brandt's political future is hostage to developments in this particular area. For Brandt, the non-aggression treaty is a trophy of success and it would be strange indeed if he did not seek to display it to his own political advantage. It can be taken for granted, in fact, that he will try to use it not only

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to broaden his base of support but also to deter his CDU opponents from any all-out attacks on his position. Assuming that in this he is successful, and he has been so far, his investment in Ostpolitik will grow. So too will the probable costs of its failure, and this is what provides the Soviets with their leverage. Brandt's domestic record is not all that enviable. Should his foreign policy -- which means, in the minds of the voters, his Eastern policy -- start to suffer serious reverses, it takes no particular stretch of the imagination to see the collapse of the coalition and the fall of the Brandt regime.

18. Under the circumstances, it is easy to understand why Bonn is already betraying a case of nerves about the Berlin talks scheduled to resume next month. The official West German line is that the Soviet-FRG treaty should work to encourage Soviet amiability and thus facilitate a quadripartite settlement. But the Soviets, while they do not wish at this point to pull the rug out from under Brandt, have no new and compelling reasons for suddenly becoming truly forthcoming about Berlin. All the old reasons for not being nice about Berlin -- not the least of which is a continuing concern about the impact of a Berlin agreement on the GDR -- would still seem to apply.

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19. The Soviets are probably much more interested in using the West Germans to help gain concessions from the Western powers on Berlin than they are in offering any really new proposals of their own. There hasn't been any about-face in the official West German position on Berlin but there are signs of movement in Bonn toward greater involvement in the talks and toward more flexible positions. At the very least it will be difficult for the three Western allies to insist on West German rights in Berlin if the West Germans themselves start calling for compromises. Indeed, Bonn is hinting broadly that the Allies should be somewhat more forthcoming in the talks lest a contrary approach eliminate chances of some sort of progress and force the Brandt government to call off ratification of the non-aggression treaty.

20. Brandt would be very reluctant to postpone ratification, but he has promised not to press it unless there is some progress in the Berlin talks. He has not, however, spelled out just what he might be willing to accept as a sign of progress. What the West Germans want from the USSR (and the GDR), in the main, is some sort of guaranteed access to West Berlin and at least tacit recognition of the FRG's legitimate role there. In return, they are willing to reduce the tangible signs of their political presence in the city.

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21. In considering all the above, however, it should be remembered that the USSR's policies in Western Europe are not shaped solely by the belief that opportunities for the expansion of Soviet interests in that part of the world are now more abundant and promising than they once were. One of the major indirect influences on Soviet European policies is concern about troubles with China, and concern of this kind, which encourages Moscow to avoid troubles elsewhere, is certainly an advantage to the West. Another important influence is the current (and anticipated) state of the Soviet economy, which, if hardly desperate, is not by a long shot what the Soviet leaders would wish it to be. They badly want long-term credits and technological assistance, in the amounts and of the character the West Europeans, and especially the West Germans, are well qualified to provide. This too could prove helpful to Western interests, at least to the extent that the Soviets are persuaded to give something meaningful -- and perhaps political -- in return.

22. There are other possible developments which could pose quite serious problems for the Soviets and which could force a Soviet retreat in the West or some kind of major change in Soviet tactics. It may be, for example, as Moscow presumably hopes, that a new relationship between the USSR and

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West Germany, together with Western recognition of the status quo, will discourage the East European search for alternatives to Soviet domination. It would be rash, however, to assume that the Soviet position in Eastern Europe will remain fairly comfortable indefinitely. Growing assertions of independence there, especially if they could be attributed to growing Western economic or political influence, might convince the Soviets that they were following a dangerous policy. Holding on to Eastern Europe, including Eastern Germany, is, in the Soviet scheme of things, much more important than expanding Soviet influence in Western Europe. To Moscow, in fact, the latter would not be even remotely possible without assurance of the former.

23. Finally, there is always the possibility that, in the end, Ostpolitik and Soviet efforts to play on Ostpolitik will come to naught, or very little. A total impasse on Berlin, the fall of the Brandt regime, or some large new development adversely affecting US-Soviet relations, any of these could thwart whatever it is the Soviets hope to achieve in Europe over the next several years. Still, whatever the tide of Soviet fortunes, the political emergence of Germany, after 25 years of a self-absorbed search for respectability and wealth, is likely

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one way or the other to have an important bearing on the course of Europe. In that sense, at least, the Soviet-West German non-aggression treaty of 1970 may come, in hindsight, to be a fairly thumping and historic event after all.

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